

# From Taboo to Mainstream?

How America's Regions Re-imagined LSD and Cannabis, 1975 – 2025

By GPT o3, with editorial guidance from Lorenzo Hagerty

**1975**

## A Nation Under the Shadow of the Controlled Substances Act

Fifty years ago the cultural aftershocks of the 1960s still rattled the country. Congress had placed both cannabis and LSD on Schedule I in 1970; President Ford was expanding the Drug Enforcement Administration; and state legislatures—Democratic and Republican alike—were rushing to stiffen penalties. Public opinion data from the period are spotty, but Gallup's earliest national polling (1977) found only about a quarter of Americans willing to legalize marijuana, and virtually none supporting psychedelics. Evangelical revivals in the South, the first stirrings of the Moral Majority, and a post—Vietnam appetite for “law and order” gave the anti-drug message a distinctly religious and patriotic flavor.

## The West

### Counterculture, Capital, and Course Corrections

On the Pacific Coast—the birthplace of Ken Kesey's Acid Tests and when California's Proposition 215 (1996) opened the nation's first medical-marijuana market. Two decades later every coastal state plus Nevada and Arizona had embraced adult-use legalization, driving the West's nation-leading, self-reported usage rate of 19 %. Silicon Valley's vogue for LSD microdosing supplied new cultural capital. Academic reviews describe a surge of controlled studies examining creativity and mood, even as national polling still shows majority opposition to full LSD legalization (53 % oppose, 20 % support). City councils—Oakland, Santa Cruz, Tacoma—lowered enforcement priority for psychedelics, while Oregon's Measure 110 (2020) decriminalized personal possession of *all* drugs before a fentanyl crisis forced partial rollback in 2024.

In the Mountain West, Colorado's libertarian streak produced the nation's first recreational-cannabis shops (2014) and, by 2024, home cultivation and gifting of psilocybin. Even Utah's heavily LDS electorate backed medical marijuana in 2018 despite church opposition, a sign that personal liberty and economic arguments can eclipse theology.

## The Northeast

### From Puritan Roots to Progressive Hubs

Dense networks of universities, biomedical employers and blue legislatures have made New England and the Mid-Atlantic a stronghold of drug legalization efforts. Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey and New York now permit recreational sales, while cities such as

Somerville and Cambridge have decriminalized natural psychedelics. Catholic bishops routinely oppose such measures, but secularization, and anger over the opioid crisis, has blunted their influence. PRRI data show 78 % of Americans who seldom or never attend church support cannabis legalization, versus 45% of weekly churchgoers. The Northeast reports the nation's lowest weekly attendance.

## **The Midwest**

### **Cautious Centrists Tip Toward Change**

Rustbelt pragmatism delayed full legalization until Michigan (2018) and Illinois (2019) broke ranks; Ohio's 2023 referendum, passing with 57 % support for cannabis legalization, proved the issue was no longer coastal turf. Midwestern usage rates (16 %) still lag the coasts, reflecting a "legal, but let's keep it tidy" ethos. However, LSD's public image remains chilly—only 28 % of Americans, and fewer Midwesterners, support legalizing psychedelics, even though university labs in Chicago and Madison quietly revived research in the 1990s.

## **The South**

### **Faith, Federalism, and Slow-Burn Reform**

Southern Baptist conventions still condemn non-prescription use of cannabis, and the region posts the lowest self-reported cannabis consumption (11 % overall; 7 % in the East South Central division). But politics is more fluid than piety. Arkansas, Florida and North Carolina run broad medical programs; Mississippi's legislature enacted one over gubernatorial objections; and Virginia decriminalized simple possession in 2021. Underground ayahuasca churches, framing their rituals as protected religious practice, are testing First Amendment boundaries that could reshape psychedelic policy throughout the Bible Belt.

## **What the Polls Reveal About Culture, Age and Partisanship**

Three variables now explain attitude gaps better than zip codes: ideology, religiosity, and age. Gallup finds 91 % of self-described liberals support cannabis legalization (versus 55 % of conservatives), while weekly churchgoers show only 45 % support. Among adults aged 18—34, 79 % favor legal marijuana and 39 % favor legal psychedelics. Even within the GOP, 57 % of Republicans under 30 back recreational cannabis.

## **The Federal Horizon**

### **Schedule III and the Psychedelic Postscript**

The Biden administration's 2024 plan to re-classify cannabis as Schedule III—still pending after delayed DEA hearings—would not legalize state markets but would slash punitive tax rules and acknowledge "moderate potential for dependence." That economic relief alone could nudge holdout Southern and Plains states toward medical marijuana programs.

For LSD, congressional reform remains unlikely this decade. Instead, watch the FDA's drug-approval pipeline: if MDMA gains a PTSD indication (decision expected 2026), pressure will mount

for rigorous LSD trials in end-of-life anxiety and cluster headaches. Medical validation can shift moral calculus even in conservative counties.

## **Outlook, 2025—2030**

**Cannabis:** By 2030, expect 35–38 recreational states as Rustbelt referenda and Sunbelt legislatures fall in line. A narrow federal safe-banking bill is probable; full descheduling hinges on Senate control.

**LSD and other psychedelics:** City-level “lowest priority” ordinances will proliferate in liberal metros, while FDA—supervised therapies outpace public enthusiasm for open adult use.

**Culture and religion:** The key unknown is whether evangelical and LDS leaderships mount a renewed moral counter offensive. Absent that, generational turnover, particularly among Latinos and suburban evangelicals, points toward normalization, not backlash.

**Bottom line:** By decade’s end cannabis is poised to become as culturally ordinary as craft beer, while LSD will remain a medically promising, culturally edgy compound navigated one courtroom at a time. The United States that reaches 2030 will still be a federation of sub-cultures, but its moral geography of drugs will look closer to the West Coast of 1975 than the Bible Belt of 1985—and that shift will echo from policing budgets to Friday night conversations in church basements.